

Have you ever made up an excuse because you didn't want to do something? For me this usually happens when it comes to folding laundry. I have no problem washing it, but once it comes out of the dryer, I find my desire to fold it dissipates. I tell myself, “Well it's not going anywhere, what is the harm in waiting just a little while?”

Sometimes I even respond by making excuses when God is calling me to do something. This year I felt God calling me to write a book that God had put on my heart four years ago. A friend invited me to a writer's conference where I would have to complete and hand in my book proposal. I kept making excuse after excuse for not finishing the book proposal. “I'm tired” I would say, or “Do I really need to do this right now with the busyness of ministry and life?”

We all have the things in our lives that God is calling us to do. To combat our desire to not do these things 1) we make excuses 2) we procrastinate or 3) we decide not to do them at all and yet God through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit continues to call us anyway.

Today we start a seven-week sermon series entitled “Called” starting with the call of Jeremiah. This series will help us recognize that we are all called through our baptism to be in mission and ministry.

Throughout the Bible, we see that people were called by God in different ways. Some of those who were called responded immediately, but many people, like the prophet Jeremiah, made excuses before they were able to fully accept God's calling upon their lives.

The beautiful thing about the Bible is that in it we see that God continued to call unwilling people to do the work of God and God is still calling us today. I hope you enjoy this series as you continue to discern how God is calling you.

So who was Jeremiah? Jeremiah grew up being part of a priestly family, and what is so interesting about him is that God called him when he was just a youth.ⁱ Most scholars believe that Jeremiah would have been about 17 when God called him to serve as a prophet.ⁱⁱ Here in our lectionary text for today from the book of Jeremiah we hear his call story.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah appointing him a prophet. Immediately he gave his excuse in Jeremiah 1:6: “...Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”

His excuse is reminiscent of Moses’ call story where he heard God speak through a burning bush. Moses hesitated before he accepted God’s calling upon his life. In Exodus 4:10 he said: “I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” Both Moses and Jeremiah made the same excuse. How were they to be used as the mouthpiece of God if they did not know what to say?

Jeremiah’s excuse was that he was too young and inexperienced and lacked the wisdom of God, while Moses’ excuse was that he had a speech impediment and did not like public speaking. God responded to both excuses in the same way. He told both these men that he would give them the words to say.

What is different in the call story of Jeremiah is that God touched his mouth to give evidence that he would now be speaking upon behalf of God. After this moment, Jeremiah was able to live fully into the calling God had placed upon his life.

Being a prophet was not easy because Jeremiah had been called to speak to people who found themselves in exile after they were overtaken by the Babylonian empire.ⁱⁱⁱ Like Moses, Jeremiah was called to call these exiles, these people of God to repentance, and then offer them hope.^{iv}

Today I am thankful for the prophet Jeremiah. He surrendered his own will so that God could speak through Him to bring words of new life and hope, and he did this at such a young age.

God’s confidence in Jeremiah reminds me of this scripture from 1 Timothy 4:12: ¹² Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.”

Throughout the Bible, we see that God called other young people to serve. He called David, the youngest son of Jesse, who in his youth defeated Goliath and he called Mary who was a teenager to bear the Christ-child.

I believe that all of these youth had excuses upon their hearts not to serve and yet God used them anyway.

Today the prophet Jeremiah encourages us to answer God’s calling upon our lives reminding us that when we surrender God works through us to do amazing things.

Just as God told the prophet Jeremiah that he had been called to “build up and to plant” through our faith in Jesus Christ, we too have been called to plant seeds of faith in others so that when God calls we will have no excuse not to answer.

Our lectionary scripture today from Luke chapter thirteen, is a story about a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years. I can’t even begin to imagine the physical, emotional, and spiritual agony she must have endured as her worldview literally changed as her ailment caused her to bend over.

What is amazing about this Scripture is that it is she who went looking for Jesus. She had to know that it was against the law for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath, but she went hoping she would be healed.

She could have made all kinds of excuses. I am sure, due to her condition she probably experienced physical pain. She may have been embarrassed of her condition, hiding from the public eye. She could have made hundred of excuses on why not to look for Jesus that day, but her hope and her faith led her forward and Jesus healed her. Immediately she was able to stand up straight.

The religious leaders were angry with Jesus. Why would he break the sabbath rules? What excuse would he make?

That day Jesus showed the woman compassion. He asked the religious leaders would they not help one of their animals if it were injured on the sabbath, then why not this woman? Christ offered her healing and dignity.

I wonder how different this story may have been for the woman if she made an excuse not to go looking for Christ that day. She is an amazing example of faith.

It takes faith in God to both hear and answer God’s calling upon our lives. Jeremiah was able to hear the call, but at first, he was not ready to respond.

Perhaps this is where you find yourself today. Maybe God has called you to do something, but you are not ready to take the first step. God is always calling us.

Sometimes God is calling us to do what we would consider the little things: to make a phone call, send a text message, write a card, help our neighbor in need. But sometimes God is calling us to do a big thing.

Just like Jeremiah dedicated 40 years of his life to God being a prophet, sometimes we too are called to do big things for God that require a lot of sacrifice.

I know for me, the big thing that God is calling me to do is to finish this book I started four years ago which is about discernment and helping people answer God’s calling upon their life.

This week, God affirmed this calling, as I was offered a contract for this book that will be published in the fall of 2021 by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Although I am thankful for this affirmation of call in community, I know that God is not done with me yet.

I think that is incentive for all of us to answer God’s calling upon our lives because God is not just calling us to do one thing one day. God calls us over and over and over again to participate in God’s saving action in the world.

So, the next time you are thinking about making an excuse to God, remember that your call is not a burden. Your call is an opportunity to take part in Christ’s redemptive work in the world.

The good news for our lives today is that God continues to call all of us to take part in Christ’s healing ministry, the ministry that offers hope and new life.

My hope for you is that as you leave these doors of the church today, that you will put any excuses you may have to serve aside, knowing that God will equip for you ministry.

God took someone with a speech impediment and revealed to him the 10 commandments to share with humanity. God took a 17-year-old boy and used him as God’s mouthpiece to bring hope to a people in exile. God anointed a little shepherd boy who would come to rule God’s people and God chose a teenager to bear the Christ-child. We serve an amazing God who continues to call us. May we put our excuses aside and surrender to God’s will. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jeremiah-Hebrew-prophet>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/life-Jeremiah.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Meeks et al. *The Harper Collins Study Bible*. Harper Collins Publishing. New York, New York. 1989. P. 1111.

^{iv} The Wesley Study Bible. NRSV. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 2009. P. 896.

Additional Resources: Kect et al. *The New Interpreter’s Bible Vol. IX*. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 1995.